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May 6, 2014

Sally Jewel
Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Daniel Ashe, Director
US Fish & Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

RE: Lack of USFWS Compliance with NEPA and Relevant Memorandum of Understanding
Regarding the Mexican Wolf EIS

Dear Ms. Jewel and Mr. Ashe:

This letter is to document our frustration and concern with NEPA violations during the Mexican Wolf EIS process occurring in Arizona and New Mexico at this time. As a Cooperating Agency to the Mexican Wolf EIS, Cochise County has expended a tremendous amount of time and money to provide personnel, expertise, comments, and travel funds to attend Mexican Wolf EIS Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) meetings and Mexican wolf public hearings, review and comment on relevant Federal Register documents, review and comment on draft Mexican Wolf Experimental Population EIS chapters, and research numerous scientific documents. To date, the NEPA process and the "IPT" meetings have been one-way downloads of wolf propaganda by USFWS personnel with virtually no opportunity for the County to provide effective input into the NEPA process. We recommend changes to the Mexican wolf recovery process now to avoid litigation.

The Mexican Wolf EIS Cooperating Agency meetings held August 8 and 9, 2013; December 10, 2013; and April 15, 2014 did not allow adequate time on the agendas for anything except USFWS personnel telling Cooperating Agencies what they have already decided to do in regard to Mexican wolf management. The August 8 – 9, 2013 meeting had only 1.5 hours out of 16 hours set aside to receive Cooperating Agency input. The remainder of the agenda was filled with USFWS personnel inundating Cooperating Agency representatives with PowerPoint information. The December 10, 2013 meeting had no time listed on the

agenda for Cooperating Agency input. The April 15, 2014 agenda had a mere one-hour slot at the very end of the day where Cooperating Agencies were invited to speak. The majority of conversations at the August, December and April meetings were quickly shut down by USFWS Wolf Recovery Coordinator, Sherry Barrett. At the end of the April 15, 2014 meeting when Cooperating Agency members voiced their ongoing frustration over the one-sided meetings, Ms. Barrett was very clear that Cooperating Agencies had been invited to Albuquerque to be told what USFWS has done to date. According to Ms. Barrett, the IPT meetings are meant to be informational, not two-way meetings.

In all three of the "IPT" meetings, Cochise County and the majority of other counties serving as Cooperating Agencies voiced their concern about the lack of opportunity to discuss issues and provide expertise. At all three meetings the USFWS agenda and USFWS PowerPoint were provided to Cooperating Agencies at least 24 hours before the meeting. We did not need to sit for virtually eight hours a day on four different days to have USFWS read the PowerPoint information that we had already read prior to the meetings.

Cochise County also prepared written comments on the Preliminary Draft EIS, Chapters 1 & 2 – Proposed Revision to the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) and the Implementation Management Plan, submitted September 19, 2013 and comments on FWS-R2-ES-2013-0056 – Proposed Revision to the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf, submitted October 23, 2013. It is disconcerting to see that our comments have been marginalized or completely ignored in the USFWS scoping document provided to Cooperating Agencies on April 15, 2014.

When we signed the Memorandum of Understanding we believed that our investment would result in recognition that the County has jurisdiction by law and special expertise to actively participate in the NEPA process at the earliest possible time; participate in the scoping process; and assume responsibility for developing information and preparing environmental analyses, including portions of the environmental impact statement of which the cooperating agency has special expertise.

As agreed to in the MOU, Cochise County has made available staff and consultant support and designated representatives to represent the County on the IPT. The County has done their part to ensure the working relationship between the County and USFWS meets the purposes and intent of NEPA. The County has also provided available information, data and supporting analyses, comments, and resources for development of proper NEPA documentation in the EIS. The County has provided timely review of the first two chapters of the EIS. The County has helped collect socioeconomic data to the maximum extent possible with the limited amount of information they know about USFWS plans for Mexican wolf reintroduction in Southern Arizona, attempted to participate in discussions about data assessment and technical reports, provided technical expertise in order to assist in evaluating the effectiveness of alternatives in the EIS, and returned consolidated and comprehensive comments on working drafts to the Service in an agreed upon time frame consistent with the planning schedule.

The USFWS has unilaterally rewritten alternatives, chastised stakeholders for attempting to submit their own alternatives, discouraged and ignored input from cooperating agencies and unilaterally made decisions on major federal actions that have significant adverse effects on the environment, outside of the NEPA process.

The Mexican Wolf Experimental Population EIS process is fatally flawed. The USFWS has abrogated its duty to use the best scientific data available. The USFWS has made a number of politically expedient decisions outside of the NEPA process including the following:

- 1) Extended Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area (MWEPA) to Mexican border;

- 2) Halted action to write a Mexican Wolf Management Plan, stating the plan is unnecessary now that the MWEPA has been extended (in violation of NEPA) to the Mexican border;
- 3) Halted the Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan for political, non-scientific reasons;
- 4) Decided to forego population goals for the expanded MWEPA in violation of the NEPA requirement to analyze impacts to alternatives;
- 5) Decided to forego the science of prey base analysis to determine how many wolves an area can support in lieu of a “rule” to allow unlimited upper numbers of Mexican wolves; and
- 6) Ignored cooperating agency input in favor of pro-wolf advocacy group pressure.

The Mexican Wolf Recovery Program in Arizona and New Mexico is severely limited by the prey base. Over 90 percent of the historic habitat for the Mexican wolf is in Old Mexico. The Mexican Wolf Recovery Program needs to be focused on Old Mexico. The portion of the recovery effort in the United States needs to be reassessed. Cooperating agencies are stakeholders in the NEPA process and the continued disenfranchisement of those agencies will result in failure of any efforts to contribute to recovery of Mexican wolves in the United States.

We recommend USFWS take a step back and reassess the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population EIS process. First, they need a Recovery Plan that details when, where and how many wolves are proposed in Arizona, New Mexico and other western states as well as Old Mexico. That number must be based on prey availability. The socioeconomic impacts have to be weighed prior to implementation of the Recovery Plan through a transparent NEPA process. Adverse impacts require mitigation measures prior to implementation of the Recovery Plan.

We cordially request dialogue with Washington DC on this matter. It appears that some or all of the Albuquerque Office USFWS personnel are too emotionally vested in Mexican wolf politics to be asked to perform a lawful NEPA analysis.

Respectfully Yours,

Ann English
Chairman

Richard R. Searle
Vice-Chairman

Patrick G. Call
Member